

The Problem of Christian Suffering, Part 3 – June 26th, 2011

- Today will be part three of a topical teaching I've chosen to title; "The Problem of Christian Suffering." We began this series two weeks ago.
- We've taken a break from our expositional teaching of Romans to do this because I sensed the Holy Spirit was leading me in this direction.
- In so doing, I know that we have caused even more suffering for the full on Bible Prophecy Addicts who are now suffering from withdrawals.

Proverbs 24:3-4 NIV By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; (4) through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.

- In part one, we built the foundation by the wisdom of "why" God allows suffering, by asking the hard "why" questions as it relates to suffering.
- In part two, we established the framework by understanding "what" God accomplishes in suffering, and "what" God does through suffering.
- In part three, we will now fill the rooms with rare and beautiful treasures by the knowledge of "how" God uses suffering in the life of a Christian.

- I suppose that a simpler way to say it would be that we have gone from the "why" to the "what," and now to the "how" of Christian Suffering.
- So, by way of introduction, we ended part two with the "what" of God allowing suffering in order to grow us, and now we're about to see "how."
- In other words, it's a question of "how" will God now grow me? The answer to this question is found in our first "how" God uses our suffering.

#1: GOD MAY HAVE TO SLOW ME - God may allow suffering because it's how He can slow me down, that I might wait on Him.

- Absent the slowing process, there's no growing process, and because God knows that this is the only way to do it, that's "how" He does it.
- This is "how" God gets my undivided attention. He allows me to suffer in order that He might slow me for that which He's about to show to me.
- I like how one said it when they quipped; if the timing's wrong God says; 'slow,' if I'm wrong He says; 'grow,' and if the request is wrong it's 'no.'

Isaiah 30:18 NKJV Therefore the LORD will wait, that He may be gracious to you; And therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you. For the LORD *is* a God of justice; Blessed *are* all those who wait for Him.

- This seems to suggest that the Lord may see fit to slow us so we have to wait for Him because that's how He is then able to be gracious to us.
- When in a trial I would do well to trust that the Lord wants to bless me not harm me. The only prerequisite is that I slow down and wait for Him.

Jeremiah 29:11 NIV For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

- The key word in this often quoted verse is "future." The plans that the Lord has for us, and declares to us, are yet future, implying a wait time.
- The problem is, we hate to wait because we want everything now. In our quest for the end product, we devalue the process to our own peril.
- It's been said that the bitterness of poor quality lingers on long after the sweetness of a cheap price. We think value and price are the same.
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- This is why God slows us, because He knows that this is how He gets us to the point where we face reality and abandon cheap superficiality.

"Why would God allow this thing to happen? ...One thing ...is ...[that it's a] knock on the head [of] all such shallow optimism as telling people to 'look on the bright side of things,' or that 'every cloud has a silver lining.' There are some clouds that are black all through. ...Facing facts as they are produces despair, not frenzy, but real downright despair, and God never blames a man for despair. The man who thinks, must be pessimistic, [as] thinking can never produce optimism. The wisest man that ever lived said that 'he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.' The basis of things are not reasonable, but wild and tragic, and to face things as they are brings a man to the ordeal of despair. ...When a man gets to despair he knows that all his thinking will never get him out, he will only get out by the sheer creative effort of God; consequently, he is in the right attitude to receive from God that which he cannot gain for himself."

Oswald Chambers, "Baffled to Fight Better," pp. 20, 21

- I think of David, who suffered in that process for years even running for his life, before he could receive the end product of the throne as King.
- It's during much of that process that we have the end product in the Psalms. This is why King David is known as the sweet Psalmist of Israel.

Psalms 27:13-14 NIV I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. (14) Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.

- Perhaps this illustration will shed some light on the value of slowing down the process; when speeding in the car, there are things I won't see.
- The more I slow down, the more I will see. So too is this true for me and you, God will slow us down, because He wants us to see something.

2: GOD MAY HAVE TO REMIND ME - God may allow suffering because this is how He can remind me, of how much He loves me.

Lamentations 3:31-33 NIV (31) For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. (32) Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. (33) For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.

- This both disturbs me and encourages me at the same time. It's disturbing that God brings the grief, it's encouraging that it's not done willingly.
- I sort of get the impression that He brings grief and affliction as a last resort. Why? Because God may need to remind me, of His love for me.
- Though He brings grief, it's how He shows compassion, so great is His unfailing love. Sometimes the suffering comes by way of chastisement.

Hebrews 12:5-11 NKJV And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "MY SON, DO NOT DESPISE THE CHASTENING OF THE LORD, NOR BE DISCOURAGED WHEN YOU ARE REBUKED BY HIM; (6) FOR WHOM THE LORD LOVES HE CHASTENS, AND SCOURGES EVERY SON WHOM HE RECEIVES." (7) If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? (8) But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons. (9) Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected *us*, and we paid *them* respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? (10) For they indeed for a few days chastened *us* as seemed *best* to them, but He for *our* profit, that *we* may be partakers of His holiness. (11) Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

"Satan's aim is to make a man believe that God is cruel and that things are all wrong; but when a man strikes deepest in agony and turns deliberately to the God manifested in Jesus Christ, he will find Him to be the answer to all his problems."

Oswald Chambers, "Baffled to Fight Better," p. 30

#3: GOD MAY HAVE TO MOVE ME - God may allow suffering because it's how He can ready me, and steady me, in order to move me.

- This is how God both readied and steadied the Israelites in order that He might move the Israelites and deliver them out of slavery in Egypt.
- He used pain and suffering in both the slavery of the Israelites, and the plagues on the Egyptians because that's how He could deliver them.
- God used persecution in the early church to move them out of Jerusalem so they would take the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the earth.

- Here's what I'm thinking; "how is God going to move us from Point A to Point B if we're so comfortable in Point A we won't consider Point B?"
- We know that God will comfort the afflicted, but so too will He afflict the comfortable. This is how He gets us to even think about moving on.
- How else will God get us to move into the promises that He has for us, or even the call that He has on us, were it not for pain and suffering.

- Whether we like it or not, pain and suffering are really powerful motivators, and to not feel pain or suffering could in fact lead to our own death.

A while back, the Associated Press ran an interesting news story titled; "Wish you could feel no pain? Think again." In the article, they reported that; "In a discovery that could lead to better pain killers, scientists have identified a genetic defect in children who cannot feel pain. Sound like a blessed way to live? It's not. ... scientists who found the gene describe six related children who have never felt pain in their lives because of the very rare disorder. ... Their experience illustrates that pain is an important warning of injury, disease or danger that signals people to save themselves from further injury. Life without that signal, the report shows, is dangerous.

- Think of it this way; if I never felt the pain of my own sin, then the schoolmaster would never be able to move me to Jesus Christ as my Savior.

- Sadly, many Christians today are under anesthesia, and do whatever they can to avoid pain and suffering, which is why God can't move them.
- The anesthetic can come in many forms, one of which is materialism. This is how some try to numb the pain, of an empty and sinful lifestyle.
- Others will try to numb the pain that they are experiencing in a bad marriage, with the anesthetic of an immoral and adulterous relationship.

- This is why and this is how, often times God will resort to using more affliction and increased pain to move us on or keep us from going astray.

Psalms 119:67 NKJV Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.

Proverbs 20:30 NKJV Blows that hurt cleanse away evil, As *do* stripes the inner depths of the heart.

#4: GOD MAY HAVE TO ENTRUST ME - God may allow suffering because this is how He can show me, what He's enabled me to do.

- God may deem it necessary that I alone am the worthy recipient of such a cup of suffering. He knows I can drink from it, and bear up under it.

Proverbs 14:10 NIV Each heart knows its own bitterness, and no one else can share its joy.

"This is one of the biggest stings in life. When a man gets to reality he has to get there alone; there is no comradeship. ... One of the most poignant bits of suffering for a [Christian is to] remain true to Jesus Christ [during those] times when you will have to go through your convictions and out the other side, and most of us shrink from such a step because it means going alone."

Oswald Chambers, "Baffled to Fight Better," p. 96

1 Corinthians 10:13 NKJV (13) No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.

#5: GOD MAY HAVE TO REFOCUS ME - God may allow suffering because it's how He is able to refocus me and redirect me.

- I'm sure you've heard that saying; "we can become so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good." Well, I totally disagree with that.
- Here's why; the scriptures are replete with how the opposite is true, in that we can become so earthly minded that we're of no heavenly good.
- I'll take it a step further and suggest that the ones who are the most heavenly minded are actually the ones who are of the most earthly good.

- The problem is that God has to somehow give us a check up from the neck up because we have stinking thinking in our earthly mindedness.
- So, the question becomes; "how is God going to do that?" Answer, pain and suffering! God chooses and uses hardship to refocus our lives.
- It's been said that if the outlook is bad, try the up-look. I'm convinced that this is how God gets us to look up and become heavenly minded.

Isaiah 26:3 NKJV You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose* mind *is* stayed *on* *You*, Because he trusts in *You*.

Matthew 6:19-21 NIV "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. (20) But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. (21) For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Proverbs 4:23 NIV Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

- Sometimes things need to go wrong, so I know that things are actually wrong here in this fallen world, which causes me to refocus on the next.

Colossians 3:1-2 NIV Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. (2) Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Romans 12:2 NIV Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

- The common denominator in all of these scriptures is this refocusing, and renewing of the mind setting it on things above.
- Again, the question becomes, how is God going to get us to that place where He can redirect us heavenward. The answer, pain and suffering.
- Sometimes things need to go wrong, so I know that things are actually wrong here in this fallen world, which causes me to refocus on the next.

"...wrong things happen actually, because things are wrong really." ...If there is no tragedy at the back of human life, no gap between God and man, then the redemption of Jesus Christ is 'much ado about nothing.' ...A healthy minded man bases his life on actual conditions, but let him be hit by bereavement, and when he has got beyond the noisy bit and the blasphemous bit, he will find ...that despair is the basis of human life unless a man accepts a revelation from God and enters into the Kingdom of Jesus Christ."

Oswald Chambers, "Baffled to Fight Better," pp. 22, 25

Acts 14:22b NIV ..."We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.